

Essential Ethical Traits

Ethical Humility

Awareness of the limits of one's ethical insight, including sensitivity to circumstances in which one's native egocentrism is likely to function self-deceptively; sensitivity to bias and prejudice in, and limitations of, one's viewpoint. Ethical humility is based on the recognition that no one should claim to know more than one actually knows. It does not imply spinelessness or submissiveness. It implies the lack of ethical pretentiousness, boastfulness, or conceit, combined with insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the logical foundations of one's beliefs.

Ethical Courage

The willingness to face and assess fairly ethical ideas, beliefs, or viewpoints to which we have not given serious hearing, regardless of our strong negative reaction to them. This courage arises from the recognition that ideas considered dangerous and absurd are sometimes rationally justified (in whole or in part), and that ethical conclusions or beliefs espoused by those around us or inculcated in us are sometimes false or misleading.

Ethical Empathy

Having a consciousness of the need to imaginatively put oneself in the place of others in order to genuinely understand them. We must recognize our egocentric tendency to identify truth with our immediate perceptions or longstanding beliefs. This trait correlates with the ability to accurately reconstruct the ethical viewpoints and reasoning of others and to reason from ethical premises, assumptions, and ideas other than our own. This trait also requires that we remember occasions when we were ethically wrong despite an intense conviction that we were right as well as consider that we might be similarly deceived in a case at hand.

Ethical Integrity

Recognition of the need to be true to one's own ethical thinking, to be consistent in the ethical standards one applies, to hold one's self to the same rigorous standards of evidence and proof to which one holds one's antagonists, to practice what one ethically advocates for others, and to honestly admit discrepancies and ethical inconsistencies in one's own thought and action.

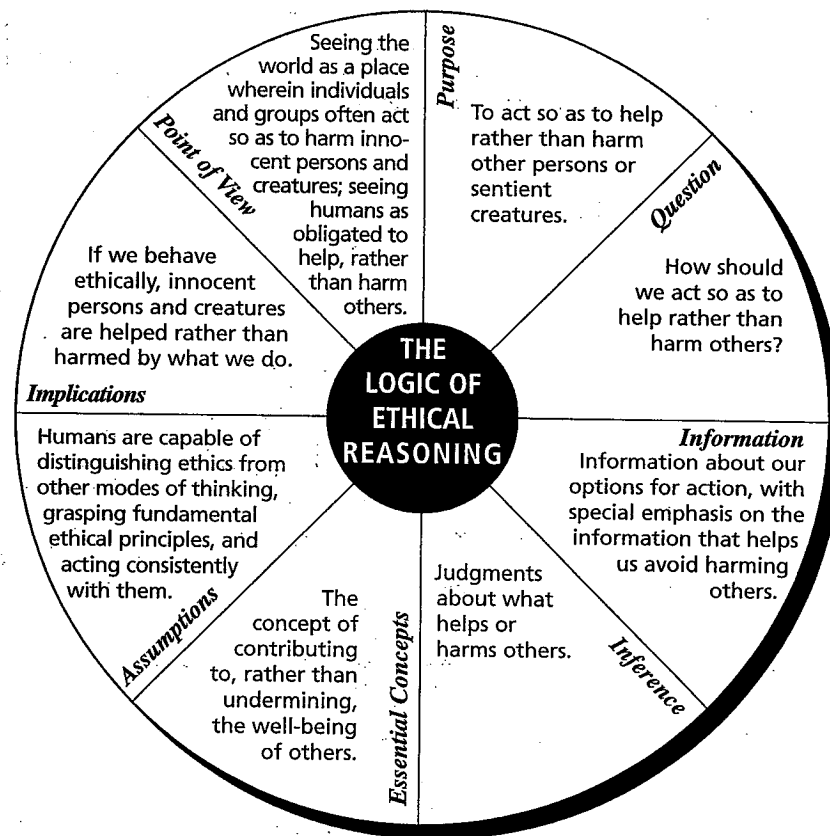
Ethical Perseverance

Willingness and consciousness of the need to pursue ethical insights and truths despite difficulties, obstacles, and frustrations, firm adherence to ethical principles despite irrational opposition of others, a sense of the need to struggle with confusion and unsettled questions over an extended period of time, to achieve deeper ethical understanding or insight.

Fairmindedness

Willingness and consciousness of the need to entertain all ethical viewpoints sympathetically and to assess them with the same intellectual standards without reference to one's own feelings or vested interests, or the feeling or vested interests of one's friends, community, or nation; implies adherence to ethical standards without reference to one's own advantage or the advantage of one's group.

The Logic of Ethical Reasoning



Intellectual Standards for Assessing Ethical Reasoning

Ethical reasoning must meet the same intellectual standards that apply to other domains of knowledge. If our ethical reasoning is to be sound, it must be clear, accurate, precise, relevant, deep, broad, logical and non-trivial. Here are brief elaborations of some important intellectual standards:

Clarity: understandable, the meaning can be grasped

(We cannot agree or disagree with ethical reasoning that is not clear to us.)

Accuracy: free from errors or distortions, true

(If ethical reasoning includes inaccurate information, it is flawed.)

Precision: exact to the necessary level of detail

(We often cannot reason through ethical issues while lacking specifics and details.)

Relevance: relating to the matter at hand

(Ethical reasoning is distorted if it uses irrelevant concepts or facts.)

Depth: containing complexities and interrelationships

(Superficial reasoning that fails to address complexities in an ethical issue is flawed.)

Breadth: encompassing multiple viewpoints

(Ethical reasoning is flawed when the reasoner ignores relevant points of view.)

Logic: the parts make sense together, no contradictions

(Humans often think in self-contradictory ways, using double standards. Both integrity and logic require that we consistently apply ethical standards.)

Significance: focusing on the important, not the trivial

(Reasoning in support of vested interests often treats relatively insignificant matters as of high ethical significance while playing down issues of significance.)

Fairness: justifiable, not self-serving (or egocentric)

(Self-centeredness and selfish interest leading to self-deception are among the most significant barriers to sound ethical reasoning.)

Clarity

How clear is our ethical reasoning? Do we need to clarify our purpose? Are we clear about the ethical concepts we are using in our reasoning? Do we need to further elaborate any point? Do we need to give further examples? Do we need to introduce clarifying analogies or illustrations?

Accuracy

How accurate is our ethical reasoning? Is any feature of the situation misrepresented or distorted? Do we provide complete information? Can we truthfully say that we are using ethical principles to guide our reasoning, or are we using social, religious or legal directives instead?

Precision

Does our reasoning lack essential details and specifics? Should we add any? Do we need more details in this question to adequately address the ethical issue?

Relevance

Is any of what we are saying unconnected to the key ethical questions we need to consider? Do we need to introduce further ethical concepts or principles? What viewpoints are relevant to the ethical issue? Are we sure this information is relevant to the ethical question? How does this or that comment bear upon the ethical issue?

Depth

Are we addressing the ethical situation and posing the ethical question in such a way as to do justice to the complexities inherent in the matter or are we oversimplifying the situation? What factors make this a difficult ethical problem? What are some of the complexities in this ethical question? What are some of the difficulties we face in reasoning through it?

Breadth

Have we considered all relevant viewpoints or have we left out a point of view germane to the ethical question? What other perspectives must we consider to do justice to the ethical issue? Do we need to look at this ethical problem in other ways?

Logic

Are we reasoning consistently? Or is our reasoning self-contradictory? Do our conclusions follow from the evidence? What is likely to happen if we act on the ethical issue in this way or that? Is this the most logical way of looking at the ethical issue?

Significance

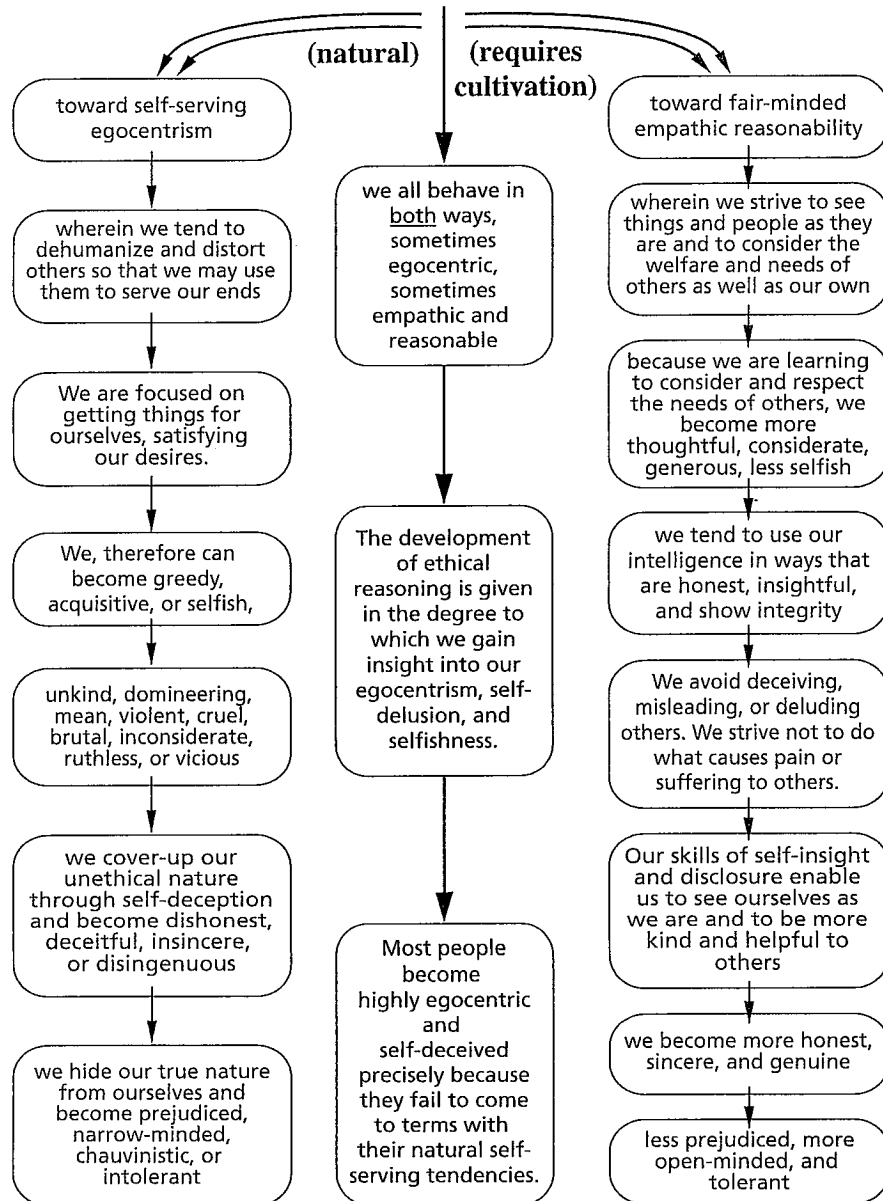
Are we focusing on the most significant ethical dimensions of the issue? Are we trivializing what is ethically significant or overstating the significance of what should be given little consideration? Is this the most important ethical problem to consider? What ethical concepts and principles are most importantly relevant to the issue? Which of these facts should be given the most weight?

Fairness

Are we treating all relevant viewpoints with consistency? Are we accurately and fairly representing the positions with which we disagree? Do we have a vested interest in distorting alternative viewpoints? Have we examined our thinking for prejudice?

The Logic of Developing as an Ethical Thinker

We are All Drawn in Two Directions



Ethical Reasoning Abilities

Ethical Affective Dimensions

- exercising independent ethical thought and judgment
- developing insight into ethical egocentrism and sociocentrism
- exercising ethical reciprocity
- exploring thought underlying ethical reactions
- suspending ethical judgement

Cognitive Dimensions: Ethical Macro-Abilities

- avoiding oversimplification of ethical issues
- developing one's ethical perspective
- clarifying ethical issues and claims
- clarifying ethical ideas
- developing criteria for ethical evaluation
- evaluating ethical authorities
- raising and pursuing root ethical questions
- evaluating ethical arguments
- generating and assessing solutions to ethical problems
- identifying and clarifying ethical points of view
- engaging in Socratic discussion on ethical issues
- practicing dialectical thinking on ethical issues

Cognitive Dimensions: Ethical Micro-Skills

- distinguishing facts from ethical principles, values, and ideas
- using critical vocabulary in discussing ethical issues
- distinguishing ethical principles or ideas
- examining ethical assumptions
- distinguishing ethically relevant from ethically irrelevant facts
- making plausible ethical inferences
- supplying evidence for an ethical conclusion
- recognizing ethical contradictions
- recognizing ethical implications and consequences
- refining ethical generalizations

Concepts Depicting Unethical Behavior or Motivation

Using Intellectual Skills to Get Others to Act Against Their Own Best Interest

Cunning	Double-dealing	Mislead
Sly	Cheat	Beguile
Crafty	Defraud	Delude
Trickery	Swindle	Betray
Wily	Dupe	Misrepresent
Duplicitious	Deceive	Use Subterfuge

Ignoring the Rights and Needs of Others to Get What You Want

Selfish	Grasping
Self-conceit	Acquisitive
Self-aggrandizement	Covetous
Greedy	Egotistic
Avaricious	

Causing Emotional Discomfort

Disrespectful	Heartless
Rude	Impatience
Ill-mannered	Insensitive
Discourteous	Petty
Unkind	Belligerent
Uncivil	Bellicose
Dishonor	Pugnacious
Hateful	Quarrelsome
Callous	Contentious

Refusing to Tell the Truth Due to Self-Interest

Dishonest	Hypocritical
Deceitful	Disingenuous
Lying	False
Untruthful	Disloyal
Insincere	

Causing Pain or Suffering

Unkind	Merciless
Dominate	Rancorous
Tyrannize	Malignant
Oppress	Pitiless
Bully	Ruthless
Hurt	Vicious
Cruel	Malicious
Brutal	Ill-willed
Inconsiderate	Malevolence
Inhuman	

Rigidity of Mind Which Keeps People from Being Ethical

Prejudice	Unfair
Bias	Chauvinist
Narrow-minded	Jingoist
Bigot	Small-minded
Zealot	Intolerant
Fanatic	

Unethical Behavior that Results From a Perceived Grievance

Holding a Grudge	Revengeful
Vindictive	Spiteful
Vengeful	

Concepts Depicting Ethical Behavior or Motivation

Going Beyond What is Obligatory to Improve the Lives of Others

Generous	Philanthropic
Unselfish	Humanitarian
Charitable	Benevolent
Altruistic	

Dealing With People Objectively in Order to Be Fair

Understanding	Unbiased
Impartial	Dispassionate
Equitable	Objective

Relating to People in Ethically Appropriate Ways

Civil	Forbearing
Polite	Tolerant
Courteous	Tactful
Respectful	

Being Forthright and Honest

Honest	Loyal
Truthful	Faithful
Integrity	Trustworthy

Relating to People in Commendable Ways

Friendly	Gracious
Obliging	Tender
Cordial	Warm
Kind	Warm-hearted
Gentle	

Being Willing to Forgive in Order to Alleviate Suffering

Forgive	Exonerate
Pardon	Compassionate
Absolve	Merciful

Acting Out of a Concern to Behave Ethically

Scrupulous	Open-minded
Honorable	Evenhanded
Upright	

Acting Out of a Concern for the Feelings of Others

Sympathetic	Compassionate
Empathetic	Considerate
Understanding	